

A report on a visit to WADU by Dr Mike Dobson

It was a great privilege for me to be able to visit WADU, a Uganda-registered NGO whose principal aims are to show God's love for the people of Uganda, by sharing the Gospel, and supporting education and development. A highlight for me was meeting a student we've been sponsoring in Kabale. She is almost at the end of her vocational course (tailoring); the skills she has learned will help provide for her family and children in the future.

In the course of their work, WADU staff often come across people with health problems. They already provide considerable help in the fields of public health - hygiene, nutrition etc. WADU does not have the capacity (nor should it try,) to become a "medical mission" with clinics, treatment centres etc, but I aimed to try and help the staff to deal with the sort of medical problems that often confront them.

I was able to provide a day's teaching in the management of nutritional and dental problems, fevers, malaria, anaemia, pregnancy complications and acute respiratory infections. I provided them with the means to test 200 people for anaemia (first screened by inspection of the conjunctivae), 10 test kits (lateral flow) for the diagnosis of malaria, baby weighing scales and a home-made MUAC measure combined with a timing pendulum to diagnosed increased respiratory frequency in ARI.

During my visit I saw the excellent public health work they are already doing among Batwa communities — Hair cutting (to reduce head lice and other infestations), extraction of jiggers, assessment of nutrition and anaemia, as well as providing supplementary feeding. These are excellent ways of improving the health of the community. I was impressed that the team keeps health records on the Batwa children - as well as identifying individual problems, this provides a way of documenting improvements in the health of the community.

Below is a report of a day's visit to one of the Batwa communities.

A grand day out

It was great to be a part of a regular team visit to a Batwa village and school. The team give up their Saturdays to visit and support a number of communities - people who a couple of generations ago were hunter gatherers in the 'impenetrable forest' (that's actually its name, and with good reason!). Displaced to make room for gorillas, and the tourist income they bring, they are 'resettled' in villages with minimal facilities. The one we visited had 180 inhabitants, about half of them children. There is one tap, and no sanitation. We meet the community in the local school - with great excitement among the children - lining up in their very best clothes, and within seconds of arrival one of the team - Marian - is leading them, singing dancing and drumming. The rest of the team swing into action providing haircuts, advice for parents, football and the largest cauldron of porridge I've ever seen.

The foreign visitors are invited to see the village. It's the poorest living accommodation you could imagine - squeezed into a narrow valley where people try to grow a few crops - mostly potatoes at present. People have no tradition of farming, and have had to learn from scratch. Some don't get enough to eat - hence the porridge. Our guide shows me where he sleeps - a one-room house, with an earth floor (not great when it rains). At one end, the remains of an open fire - that's also where he sleeps. At the other end, a few agricultural tools. Furniture is a blanket on the floor, for sleeping on. The total living space maybe five feet by ten.

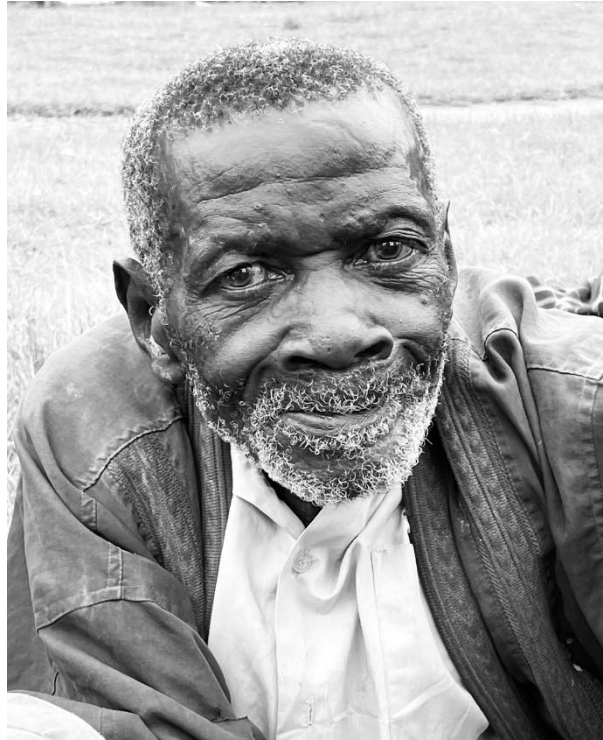
My phone pings, and I'm shocked at the incongruity of a mobile network reaching a one-tap village.

During our visit the team have been screening children for malnutrition, anaemia and jigger infections. Towards the end, when one of them is free to translate, I'm able to provide medical advice for half a dozen adults. Last of all is an old man (most people here don't know their own age) with a staff - perhaps a sign of infirmity, perhaps of authority. He's waited patiently all day. His condition is not serious, and I suspect he just wanted to chat. Which we do. I point to the forest on

the hills above us. “Did you live in there?” “Oh yes”. “Then you are stronger than me. If I tried to live in there I would be dead in two weeks”. We share a laugh. It’s been a good visit.

There’s no more land available for the Batwa to farm. Training some for non-farming occupations, as WADU/CDU is doing with your support, is the only way the community can support itself. That means more educational support, including support for secondary education that WADU wants to increase.

If they can raise the funds.



The old Batwa man